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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Friday, December 8, 1939

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "VITAMIN A". Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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What I have to say today concerns vitamin A--one of those invisible substances in food that everyone needs in his diet. I'm passing on to you a few of the highlights of what scientists have found out about vitamin A since they discovered it some thirty years ago.

In those few years, the story of vitamin A has been unfolding rapidly--sentence by sentence, even chapter by chapter. And although this story is not complete as yet, scientists can draw a number of practical conclusions from their research literature.

For one thing, they can say with certainty that vitamin A is an indispensable item in the diet. They know that vitamin A is a definite chemical substance. In fact, they have isolated vitamin A. At ordinary temperatures it is a thick pale-yellow liquid. At very low temperatures, pure crystals of vitamin A look like beautiful clusters of pale yellow needles.

But let me read you some of the vitamin-A story directly--from a recent release of the Federal Bureau of Home Economics.

"Vitamin A is a distinct chemical substance with its own special functions to perform in the body. It is necessary for good nutrition at all ages. It helps to promote normal growth. Children who do not get enough vitamin A when their teeth are forming may have defective teeth. And anyone who continues to get less vitamin A than he needs will suffer bad effects sooner or later--though there won't be any startling symptoms immediately.

"One of the very first signs of a vitamin-A deficiency is nutritional night blindness. This can be detected by special instruments that measure a person's adjustment from bright to dim light. A night blind person will not be able to adjust his eyes to dim light as well as he should. For instance, when he comes into a dimly lighted theater from a brightly lighted entrance--he will have more than ordinary difficulty in finding his way."

But so much for what happens when vitamin A "isn't there." Here is a more positive angle of the story--about the foods from which we can get vitamin A. Incidentally, it occurs in some of our most common foods. And nutrition experts say that a lot of times a diet can be improved--not by spending any more money--but simply by choosing food more wisely.

"In food, there are at least five different sources of vitamin A. There is vitamin A itself, for one. This appears only in certain foods of animal origin. Then there are four yellow pigments that can be changed in the body to vitamin A. These pigments occur both in animal and in plant foods.

"The richest natural sources of vitamin A are livers of various animals--especially those of certain kinds of fish. There are substantial amounts in whole milk--in cream--in butter--in egg yolks--and in cheese made from whole milk or cream. Oily fish, such as salmon and sardines, also appear among the foods contributing vitamin A.

"In the plant kingdom--look for the greens and the yellows. For these generally mean that there are carotenes present in the fruit or the vegetable. The carotenes are pigments that are transformed into vitamin A in the body.

"Green leafy vegetables--are excellent sources of vitamin A. And of the leafy head vegetables--such as cabbage and lettuce--the greener, the richer they are. For example, the outer green leaves are much richer in vitamin A than the bleached inner leaves. Some of the more common green leafy vegetables rich in

vitamin A are kale--spinach--dandelion greens/ ^{and} turnip greens.

"Other good vegetables sources of carotene that in turn changes into vitamin A--are yellow carrots--yellow-fleshed sweetpotatoes--and Hubbard squash.

"Of the fruits--the yellow-fleshed ones, such as apricots and peaches, are the valuable sources."

As for how much vitamin A a person needs--that depends upon his age--and seems to depend in part anyway upon his weight. That is, larger persons need more than those built on a smaller scale. And children need more than adults.

But let me quote you a practical example of how much vitamin A a person can use a day--in terms of common food items.

"For children--between the ages of 2 and 14--a liberal amount of vitamin A will be provided if their daily food contains about 1 quart whole milk--an egg--servings of green leafy vegetables--servings of butter--and a teaspoonful of cod-liver oil--or its equivalent in other fish-liver oil.

"On the other hand--a normal adult's daily requirement for vitamin A can be supplied by a daily allowance of one pint of whole milk--one egg--two ordinary sized pats of butter--and an average serving of a leafy green or a yellow vegetable.

"Naturally--you don't have to have exactly these foods every day. For many other foods also rate as excellent sources of vitamin A."

As for how well food retain their vitamin A--for all practical purposes you can consider it a fairly stable vitamin. In general, rapid cooking and the usual home and commercial canning do not destroy vitamin A materially."

And that ends my story on vitamin A--from the Federal Bureau of Home Economics--and my broadcast for today.

